
Manner: NATURAL

A death that is classified as natural comes under the jurisdiction of the Medical Examiner because of the sudden and unexpected nature of the death, because there is no physician who has knowledge or awareness of the decedent's condition, or when circumstances surrounding death arouse suspicion. In these situations, the Medical Examiner becomes responsible for certification of death. It should be stressed that the natural deaths investigated by the Medical Examiner are not representative of all natural deaths in the general population, because these jurisdictional considerations introduce a significant bias.

In 2003, there were 775 deaths attributed to natural causes that came under the jurisdiction of the King County Medical Examiner, representing 43% (775/1,815) of the cases investigated. Seventy-five percent (580/775) of these deaths were certified by the King County Medical Examiner, and 25% (195/775) were certified by attending physicians who had knowledge of the decedent's medical condition. Autopsies were performed in 74% (430/580) of the deaths certified as natural by the King County Medical Examiner, which includes autopsies performed in all 14 deaths from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Deaths categorized as "congestive heart failure" were certified by physicians outside of the King County Medical Examiner's Office who did not certify specific type of cardiovascular disease.

The data presented in this section are derived from the 775 natural deaths under the King County Medical Examiner's jurisdiction. Cardiovascular disease accounted for the greatest proportion of natural deaths. Most deaths in which an autopsy was not performed were certified as due to "probable arteriosclerotic cardiovascular disease".

Table 5-1 Disease Processes Causing Natural Deaths in 2003

NUMBER OF DEATHS	DISEASE DESCRIPTION
CARDIOVASCULAR	
13	Aortic aneurysm/dissection
181	Arteriosclerotic cardiovascular disease (ASCVD)
3	Bacterial endocarditis
9	Cardiac dysrhythmia
8	Cardiomyopathy
3	Congenital heart disease
3	Congestive heart failure
97	Hypertensive ASCVD / hypertensive heart disease
7	Myocarditis
117	Probable arteriosclerotic cardiovascular disease
3	Valvular heart disease
6	Other
450	TOTAL CARDIOVASCULAR
CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM	
8	Epilepsy (idiopathic & other non-traumatic etiologies)
5	Meningitis
15	Spontaneous intracerebral hemorrhage
19	Spontaneous rupture of aneurysm
12	Other
59	TOTAL CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM
ENDOCRINE	
9	Diabetic ketoacidosis
6	Diabetes mellitus
3	Pancreatitis
2	Other
20	TOTAL ENDOCRINE
Gastrointestinal	
1	Bacterial peritonitis
3	Gastrointestinal hemorrhage
1	Obstruction
4	Perforating ulcer
5	Other
14	TOTAL GASTROINTESTINAL

Table 5-1
(cont'd)**Disease Processes Causing Natural Deaths in 2003**

NUMBER OF DEATHS	DISEASE DESCRIPTION
HEPATIC	
4	Cirrhosis
2	Cirrhosis and fatty liver
1	Fatty liver
2	Hepatic failure
7	Hepatitis
8	Other
24	TOTAL HEPATIC
MALIGNANCY	
2	Breast
3	Colon
8	Lung
3	Pancreas
1	Rectum
14	Other
31	TOTAL MALIGNANCY
OTHER PROCESSES	
29	Chronic ethanolism
9	Chronic renal disease
10	HIV / AIDS
12	Infection
1	Labor/Delivery/Prematurity
10	Necrotizing fasciitis
9	Sepsis
12	Other
92	TOTAL OTHER PROCESSES
RESPIRATORY	
1	Asthma
19	Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
28	Pneumonia
16	Pulmonary thromboembolus
14	Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)
7	Other
85	TOTAL RESPIRATORY

Table 5-1
(cont'd)**Disease Processes Causing Natural Deaths in 2003**

NUMBER OF DEATHS	DISEASE DESCRIPTION
325	TOTAL Non-cardiovascular Cause of Death
450	TOTAL Cardiovascular Cause of Death
775	Total NATURAL DEATHS under KCMEO Jurisdiction, 2003

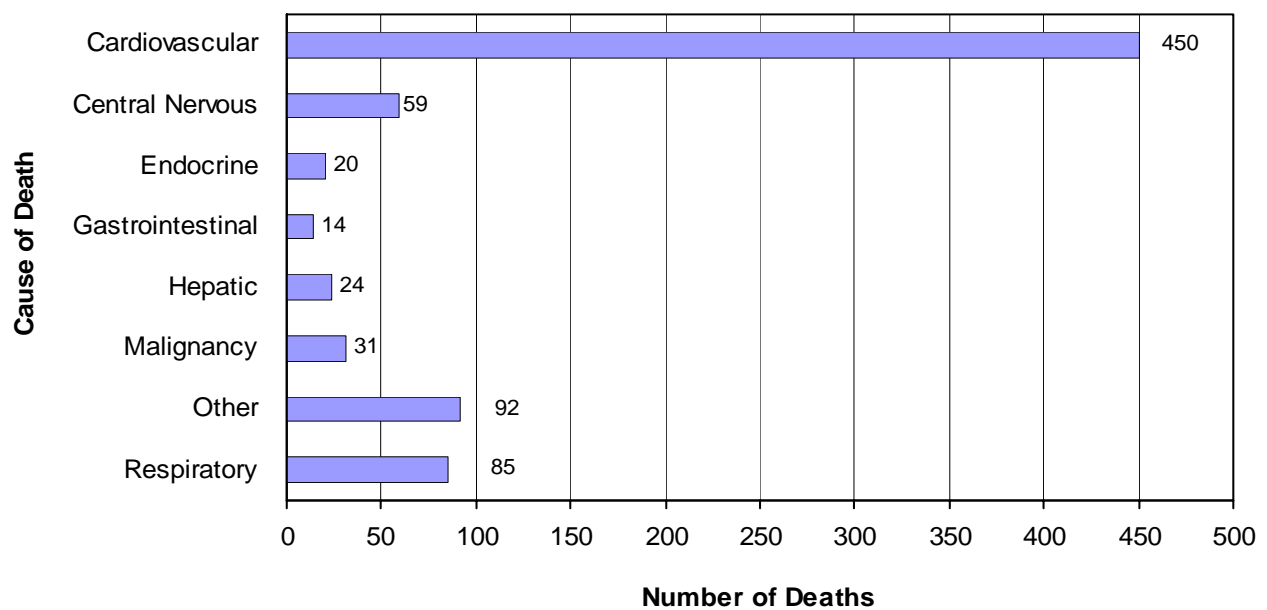
Graph 5-1**Deaths Due to Natural Causes in 2003**

Table 5-2 Deaths Due to Natural Causes and Race of the Decedent

DISEASE PROCESS/ GENDER	RACE					SUB TOTAL	TOTAL
	WHITE	BLACK	ASIAN	NATIVE AMERICAN	OTHER		
Cardiovascular	369	38	33	5	5		450
<i>Male</i>	260	31	23	4	5	323	
<i>Female</i>	109	7	10	1	0	127	
Central Nervous	46	4	6	0	3		59
<i>Male</i>	23	0	5	0	3	31	
<i>Female</i>	23	4	1	0	0	28	
Endocrine	14	4	1	0	1		20
<i>Male</i>	8	4	0	0	1	13	
<i>Female</i>	6	0	1	0	0	7	
Gastrointestinal	9	3	2	0	0		14
<i>Male</i>	4	1	1	0	0	6	
<i>Female</i>	5	2	1	0	0	8	
Hepatic	20	2	1	1	0		24
<i>Male</i>	17	2	0	1	0	20	
<i>Female</i>	3	0	1	0	0	4	
Malignancy	27	2	1	1	0		31
<i>Male</i>	15	0	1	0	0	16	
<i>Female</i>	12	2	0	1	0	15	
Other	73	4	3	5	7		92
<i>Male</i>	52	4	2	3	7	68	
<i>Female</i>	21	0	1	2	0	24	
Respiratory	62	15	1	3	4		85
<i>Male</i>	33	9	0	3	4	49	
<i>Female</i>	29	6	1	0	0	36	
Undetermined	0	0	0	0	0		0
<i>Male</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	
<i>Female</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Total	620	72	48	15	20		775
Percent	80%	9%	6%	2%	3%		

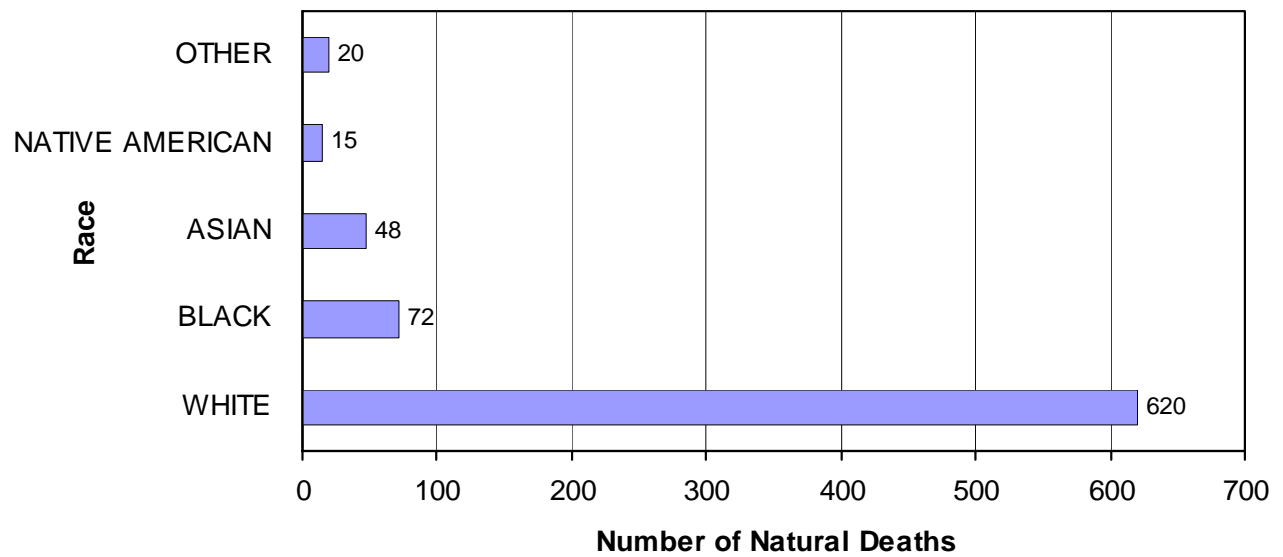
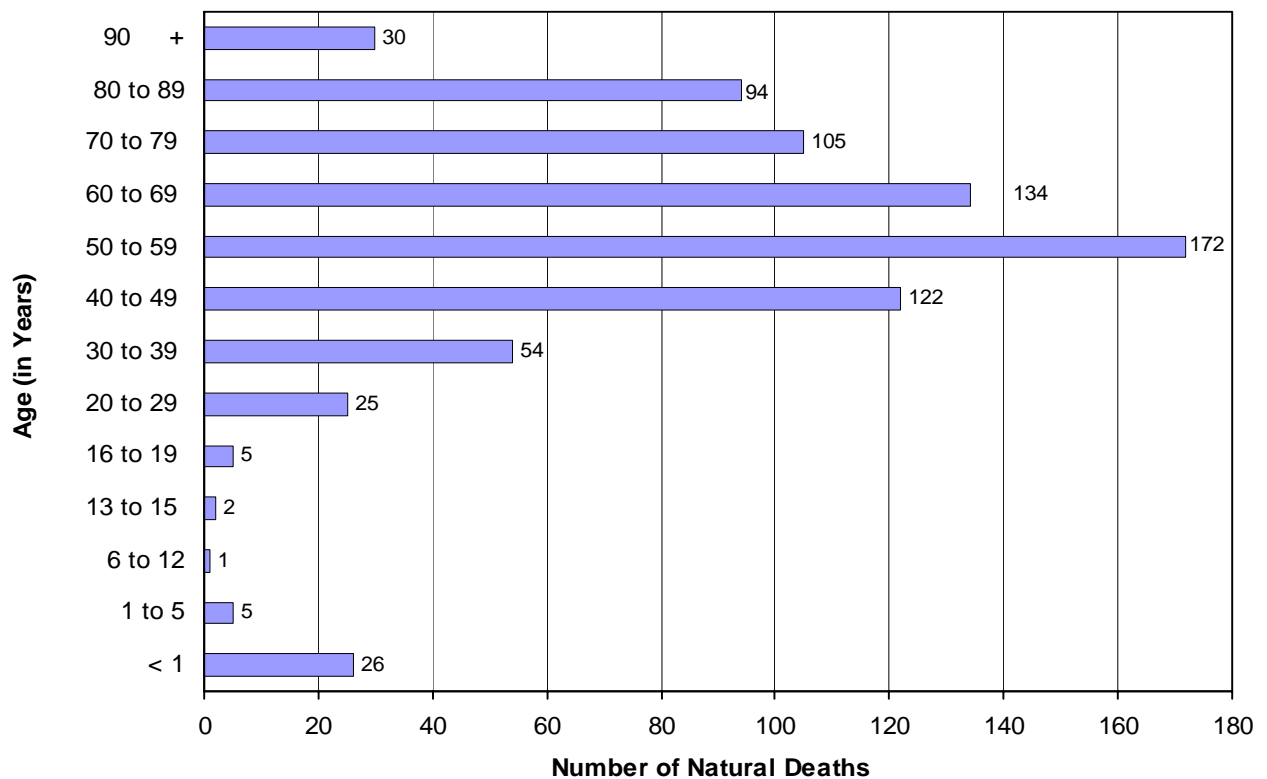
Graph 5-2 Deaths Due to Natural Causes and Race of the Decedent**Graph 5-3 Deaths Due to Natural Causes and Age Group of the Decedent**

Table 5-3 Deaths Due to Natural Causes and Age Group of the Decedent

DISEASE PROCESS/ By GENDER	AGE GROUP (YEARS)													SUB TOTAL	TOTAL
	< 1	1 to 5	6 to 12	13 to 15	16 to 19	20 to 29	30 to 39	40 to 49	50 to 59	60 to 69	70 to 79	80 to 89	90 +		
Cardiovascular	3	1	0	1	4	5	23	61	98	81	80	72	21		450
Male	3	0	0	0	4	2	20	51	82	66	46	40	9	323	
Female	0	1	0	1	0	3	3	10	16	15	34	32	12	127	
Central Nervous	2	1	1	1	0	8	6	11	13	3	3	5	5		59
Male	1	1	1	0	0	4	3	8	8	2	1	1	1	31	
Female	1	0	0	1	0	4	3	3	5	1	2	4	4	28	
Endocrine	0	0	0	0	0	2	4	5	5	2	1	1	0		20
Male	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	3	2	1	1	0	13	
Female	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	7	
Gastrointestinal	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	3	4	2	1	1		14
Male	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	1	0	1	6	
Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	1	1	1	0	8	
Hepatic	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	9	7	2	0	2	0		24
Male	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	7	7	2	0	1	0	20	
Female	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	4	
Malignancy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	5	11	7	5	0		31
Male	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	6	2	3	0	16	
Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	5	5	2	0	15	
Other	2	1	0	0	0	7	9	18	29	17	6	1	2		92
Male	1	0	0	0	0	4	8	12	25	10	6	1	1	68	
Female	1	1	0	0	0	3	1	6	4	7	0	0	1	24	
Respiratory	18	2	0	0	1	3	8	13	12	14	6	7	1		85
Male	8	1	0	0	1	1	4	9	8	7	4	5	1	49	
Female	10	1	0	0	0	2	4	4	4	7	2	2	0	36	
Undetermined	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		0
Male	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Total	26	5	1	2	5	25	54	122	172	134	105	94	30		775
Percent	3%	1%	0%	0%	1%	3%	7%	16%	22%	17%	14%	12%	4%		

Table 5-4 Deaths Due to Natural Causes and Gender of the Decedent

CIRCUMSTANCES	GENDER		TOTAL
	MALE	FEMALE	
Cardiovascular	323	127	450
Central Nervous	31	28	59
Endocrine	13	7	20
Gastrointestinal	6	8	14
Hepatic	20	4	24
Malignancy	16	15	31
Other	68	24	92
Respiratory	49	36	85
Undetermined	0	0	0
Total	526	249	775
Percent	68%	32%	

Table 5-5 Natural Cause Deaths and Blood Alcohol Test Results

METHOD	TESTED		NOT	TOTAL
	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	TESTED	
Cardiovascular	44	212	194	450
Central Nervous System	3	28	28	59
Endocrine	0	9	11	20
Gastrointestinal	2	5	7	14
Heptic	5	7	12	24
Malignancy	0	8	23	31
Other Processes	15	30	47	92
Respiratory	1	41	43	85
Total	70	340	365	775
Percent	9%	44%	47%	